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# Two Poems

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# *Two Poems*

THERESA KISHKAN

## Ice-Age

Finding charcoal, we knew  
the cave had held others

in the past we had known  
all our lives.

It was there they gathered  
at the coming of the ice-age,

driven from the plains  
to the shelter of clefted rock,

discovering in their hands  
a knowledge of tools,

in flint  
the origins of fire.

We had been told the turning  
of seasons found them fitting

skins about themselves:  
thread of sinew, needle of bone;

and we had been told  
of their burials:

entire families facing west  
in postures of sleep,

given implements and food  
for the journey into night.

We found a comfort  
in the simple shape of hearth,  
in the fading lessons  
of the hunters who dreamed  
their prey to earth,  
disarming the spirits of the dead.  
Now we have come to this  
and there is no returning  
to what we were  
before we heard the ice  
progressing ourselves,  
our old ways frozen in the wake.

## A Shadow of Antlers

—for Ann York

Winter is a bad season  
to die.

You knew that  
but still you ignored  
moss on the north side  
of trees

because you wanted to be lost,

to lay down in your bones  
like the oldest animals,

to be brought simply to earth  
by your instincts.

What you did not know:  
they would find you,  
without sympathy,

thinking your death deliberate,  
without cause,  
and you would be given up  
as a suicide

to be buried under a heavy stone,  
the cold spades clanging  
and the coffin wood green.

Forget the reasons.  
Forget the slow softening  
you imagined,

your bones giving themselves  
to the soil,  
your flesh a meal  
for a starving brother.

Winter is a bad time  
all around

but spring will come  
to thaw the ground  
to the idea of you there  
against your will  
and buried deep.

Maybe the ringing of metal  
will die in your ears,  
the wood will cure itself,  
and you can rest or sleep,  
whatever you wanted.

Down where you are  
is lonely  
but I know the moon and bare trees  
can make a shadow of antlers,

a herd of old elk  
can lie over you  
to warm you.